

## How can we build a knowledge-based economy?

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**B**ANGLADESH is on its way to becoming a middle income country by 2021. To achieve this status, rebuilding a knowledge-based economy is essential. By transforming our vast human resources into skilled workforce equipped with innovative and creative abilities, we can create our knowledge capital replacing physical capital required for a knowledge-based economy. The strong desire and thirst of our youth for higher education along with our rich cultural heritage, ancient technologies, combined with new knowledge could steer our country towards becoming the "Knowledge Hub" of South Asia. Recently, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has taken initiatives in preparing 2016-2026 strategic planning for higher education. It is our expectation that the plan should be aimed for preparing graduates who will be qualified as skilled workforce.

The successful transition to knowledge-based economy and developing the country as a knowledge-hub depends on the key contribution from higher education institutions. For this, special emphasis needs to be placed on the development of educational infrastructure, curriculum, research, innovation, as well as on the improvement of generic skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, leadership, planning and organising, self and stress management, analytical thinking and enterprise skills) and enhancement of the use of technology in teaching and learning process, including online and distant learning.

At the time of Bangladesh's independence, there were only six public universities. Today there are a total of 38 public universities and 91 private universities in the country. Though a good number of universities have been established in twenty five years, the education system has changed little. The universities in Bangladesh still follow a traditional education system, which has been shown to be an ineffective system for producing graduates who are adequately prepared for handling the real world. There are many signs that the current

paradigms are no longer adequate for meeting growing and changing societal needs. We need an ability driven education system with a focus on innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship which can produce smart graduates. Like universities abroad, Higher Education Institutions in Bangladesh should have adopted ability driven education — 'Outcome Based Education'. These institutions should enrich each curriculum with Bangladesh's history and social responsibility. Each programme must have

a way that student's understanding of the subject can be assessed. Students are required to expose themselves to the economic and societal problems in the world. They will be assigned a task in which they can demonstrate their mastery and assessment should be based on their performance.

Strategic plan should address the issues discussed above. The committees for strategic plan will hopefully review the plans of both developing and developed countries before

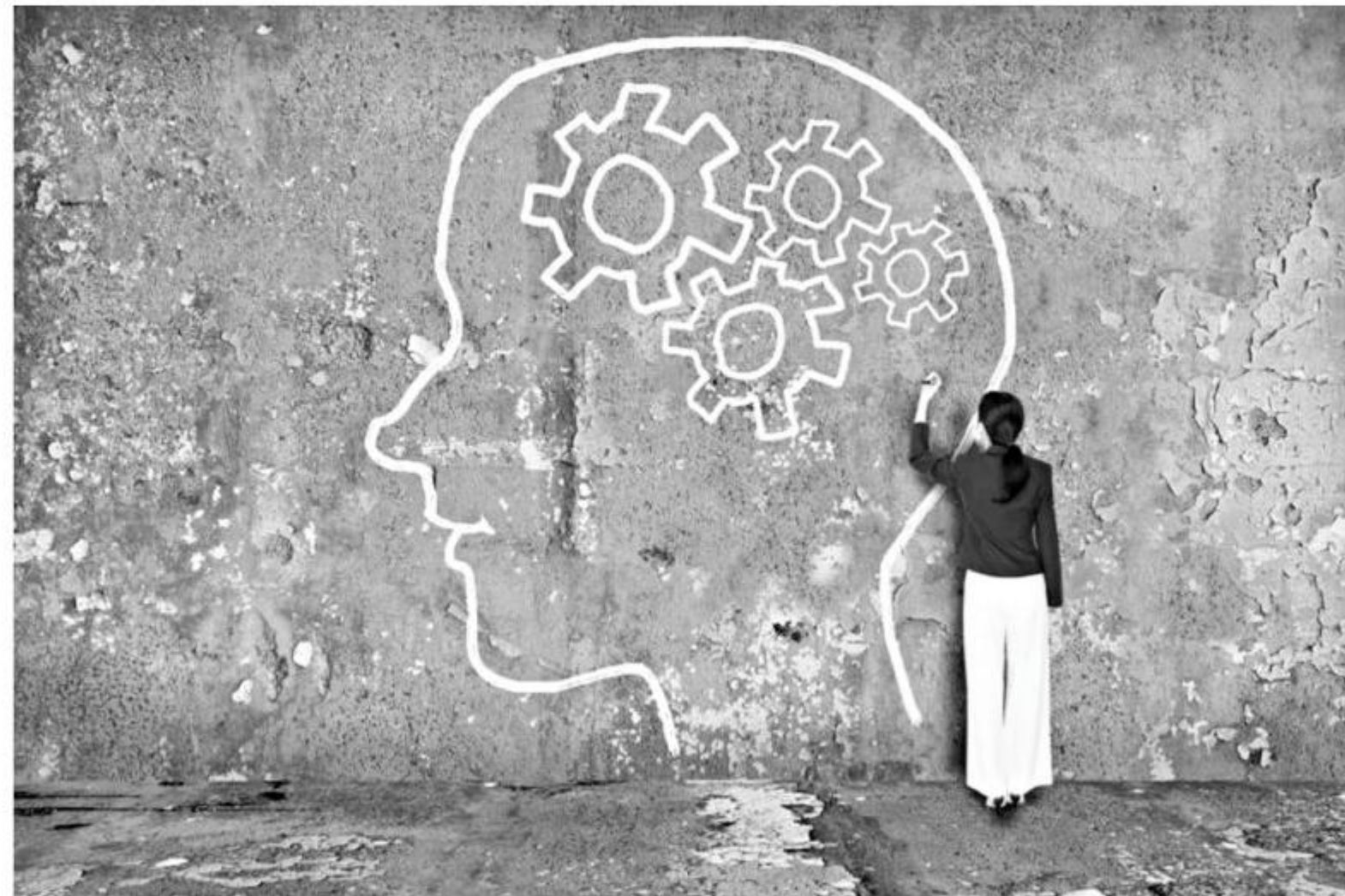
cooperation and competitiveness, (vi) facilitate the establishment of at least three elite (research) higher education institutions in each of the disciplines of science and engineering, business and management, social sciences, and medicine, (vii) increase intake to postgraduate programmes of universities by 5 percent annually, (viii) introduction of new degree programmes of relevance to the job market and of high quality, (ix) modernisation of the development of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. ODL and life-long learning will be expanded to admit off campus undergraduates and postgraduates with access to good teaching support systems, (x) develop specialised education programme, etc.

The specialised education programme is a technical education stream. After completing junior secondary, students may choose a technical education stream and go to technical school and study two years there to obtain a certificate equivalent to SSC. The students may then continue to follow the technical path and study at technical institutes/colleges and obtain certificates after studying another two years at institutes/colleges. The certificate is equivalent to HSC. These students may be allowed to enrol at tertiary programme. Students after studying two years at a technical school may come back to a normal programme and study higher secondary. After completing two years study at the technical school (or at technical college) they can go directly into factories and be productive in a very short time with minimal on-the-job training.

Bangladesh needs to put knowledge and innovation policies, as well as higher education, at the core of its development strategies and build indigenous knowledge capacity through huge investments in education and research. We expect that 2016-2026 strategic planning for higher education will provide a guideline in overcoming weaknesses in the present education system and revitalisation of universities and for linking higher education to development.

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certain educational objectives and programme outcomes.

Method of teaching needs a relook. Teachers need to encourage logical thinking and creativity in students. Our universities can consider problem-based learning, student-centred instruction, and competency-based (outcomes-based) instruction. Nowadays, performance based assessment is preferred over traditional assessment. Questions in examinations are set in

setting goals and vision of the strategic plan. The goals should (i) bring higher education in line with the social, cultural and economic needs of the country, (ii) ensure high quality curriculum is in place so that students are best prepared for the knowledge economy, (iii) strengthen research, innovation and entrepreneurship, (iv) increase role of higher education institutions as strategic partners in socio-economic development, (v) increase international