

'Universities must have strategic roadmaps to develop skills'



Sketch: TBS

Prof Qumrul Ahsan, vice chancellor of University of Asia Pacific (UAP), shares the university's journey thus far, its achievements, vision, challenges and their approach towards nurturing students. In an interview with *The Business Standard*, he said UAP programs are designed with the highest priorities for producing market-oriented graduates.

What is the vision of your university?

University of Asia Pacific, since its inception in 1996, has been one of the leading private universities of Bangladesh with the aim of enhancing the scope for higher education and promoting innovative educational opportunities. UAP was established by UAP Foundation for Human and Social Development (FHSD), formed by a group of 33 eminent educationists, industrialists, and civil service officers who shared the same vision and social commitments to enhance the opportunities for higher education in Bangladesh. UAP's vision is to advance science, technology, and humanities through innovation in higher education, research, and development for a better society.

Do you think UAP has achieved its goal?

The UAP family is highly committed to moving forward and attaining the goals envisioned during the inception of this university. We have developed our teams with the highest levels of dedication in every aspect so that we can set the goals and establish the philosophical and moral framework to make our vision durable.

What has been the achievement of the university till now?

Our biggest achievement was to have successfully hosted the 45th International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) world finals in Dhaka on 6-11 November this year in cooperation with the Bangladesh government. ICPC is an annual algorithmic programming contest for university students where teams of three, representing one university from all over the world, participates to solve most real-world problems, fostering collaboration, creativity, and innovation.

Besides, UAP recently received the Permanent Certificate from the Ministry of Education for meeting all requirements of a permanent certificate as required by the Private University Act, 2010. All our academic programs are rated "Very Good" by the Institution Quality Assurance cell of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

If we look at UAP's ranking nationally and globally, we find a gradual rise over the years. In 2021, we ranked 9th among private universities and 27th among all public and private universities in Bangladesh in the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities. The following year, Scimago Institution Rankings ranked UAP 5th among private universities and 18th among all public and private universities of the country while our Asia ranking significantly went up at 458th. In 2022, UAP ranked 2nd among private universities and 18th among all public and private universities, while it ranked 333rd in Asia and 729th in the world in terms of innovation, research and publications and social contribution.

It is a matter of pride for us that some of our faculty members have achieved national and international recognition in their respective fields of research for their outstanding contributions. Our alumni are also performing exceptionally well in top positions at different levels of national and international organisations, both at home and abroad.

What is the specialty of your university?

UAP maintains a highly qualified and strongly motivated faculty to educate students in subjects that accommodate the latest advances in science and technology. We follow the best practices in teaching and facilitate learning supported by modern laboratories and library facilities apart from vibrant co-curricular activities. All our funds are spent on infrastructure development to ensure our students get modern research laboratories and well-equipped classrooms.

UAP always offers various facilities to meritorious and underprivileged students. Other than tuition waivers on SSC and HSC results, 10-12% students are taught free of cost while the UGC directive is of at least 6%. Besides, students have various scholarship opportunities, including up to 100% tuition waiver.

Apart from the freedom fighter quota, there is a VC special waiver, in particular for students from remote and underdeveloped areas. We waived 25% tuition fees for students during the Covid period. We focus on creating an excellent environment for students to be engaged in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. We have 15 central clubs and 87 clubs at different departments.

Are you producing market-oriented graduates? And do you have any initiative to link the graduates to the industry?

All our science, engineering and business programs are well designed with the highest priorities to produce market-oriented graduates. We regularly update our syllabus considering the ongoing market demands. Every semester all our departments arrange industry visits to different organisations so that our students can gain practical knowledge on how respective industries operate. A good number of courses are taught by faculty members with industry background. Moreover, we have signed a number of MoUs with the top-notch research and industrial organisations aiming to facilitate an early option of apprenticeship for our students. We often arrange programs like Meet the CEO, industry-academia collaboration and special Lectures.

UAP believes that collaboration between universities and industries can be very fruitful. Such collaborations have been recognised as the key enabler to promote innovation. On the other hand, industries look towards academia for solving their R&D problems to remain competitive.

Why will students choose your university?

There are several reasons why students choose UAP. First and foremost, UAP has a permanent campus with all modern facilities at the centre of Dhaka – Farmgate. All our engineering, architecture, pharmacy and law degrees are accredited by relevant professional institutions and registration councils. We have collaboration with several universities in the USA, UK, Australia, and Canada and there is an opportunity for students to transfer credits and complete education from these universities. As UAP is committed to providing the best education, our faculty members keep constant contact with students and advise them regularly on academic and personal matters.

Over the years, a good number of UAP graduates have been holding senior positions in academia, government organisations, and leading companies at home and abroad. We have upgraded our academics in order to accommodate the latest advances of science and technology so that our students can take full advantage of it. We have also encouraged our faculty members to make an impactful role in academic publications.

We have an excellent reputation, with many of our pharmacy graduates currently working abroad. They also have high demand in the Bangladesh market. Our engineering and law students are doing extremely well in their respective fields. UAP is the only university in Bangladesh to introduce students from SAARC countries for our LLM program under UNESCO-Madanjeet Singh South Asian Institute of Advanced Legal and Human Rights (UM-SAILS).

Other facilities include a modern auditorium, well-equipped classrooms and laboratories, aesthetic central library, medical services, counselling centre and indoor games for students.

What are the challenges of the university in providing quality education?

Providing quality education is the biggest challenge. Universities must have strategic roadmaps to develop skills and competencies of students through creativity and innovations, foster educational mobility using credit transfer systems and adopt schemes for the marketability of the higher education sector at international level.

Most of our students, coming from remote areas, do not have a good command of the English language. Initially they face acute problems in coping with the language. Since UAP focuses on quality education, we select students through the admission process and make sure the admission process is free of any external influence.

Realising the market demand for skilled graduates, we have recently introduced an office of International Advisory Council comprising academic experts from home and abroad to assist our university in making a better strategic plan.

What is the future plan of the university?

UAP plans to expand its academic programs with all modern academic and physical facilities. Therefore, UAP has adapted long-term and short-term strategic plans with a vision to develop quality educational programs. The programmes are tailored for empowering students to teach their fellow students, hone their skills and make them industry ready.

Do you think that education migration can be reduced by the existing education system at private universities?

We believe reducing education migration is only possible by providing quality education. We are also taking initiatives to introduce certified training programs administered by industries and business organisations. Another important aspect is

the social role of the university. Our responsibility is to equip students with adequate skill sets and help them chart a successful future for themselves.