

Autonomous colleges offer new job routes

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Calcutta: Autonomous colleges across Bengal have introduced self-financed undergraduate and postgraduate courses in emerging and unconventional disciplines to attract meritorious students.

Ramakrishna Mission Residential College (Autonomous), Narendrapur, has introduced the postgraduate course in social work this year. The college will hold admission tests to screen students for 40 seats, said principal Swami Ekachittananda.

"This is a professional course and offers job opportunities," the principal said.

Behala College, which attained autonomous status this year, has introduced self-financed BSc programmes in cybersecurity, multimedia, and web development.

The college has also started a graduation course in computer applications (BCA).

St Xavier's College (Autonomous), Burdwan, which became autonomous this February, has introduced BSc in data science and BA in tourism and hospitality management in self-financed mode.

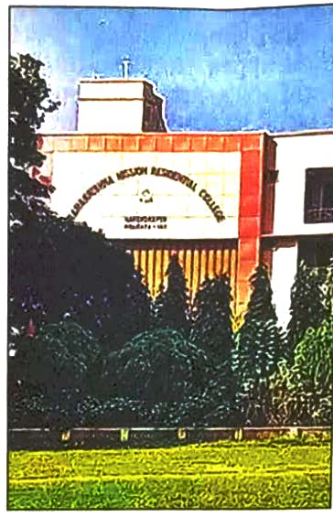
Father G. Paul. Arokiam, the principal of the college, said students leave Bengal to study professional courses that offer job opportunities.

"We have started the programmes here so that the exodus of students can be stopped," he said.

He added that the college's traditional courses have also become self-financed following its transition to autonomous status, as it no longer receives government funding.

An official of the education department said it is an encouraging trend that colleges in Bengal are becoming autonomous to offer courses in sync with the times and attract students.

Till last year, Bengal had only four autonomous colleges — the three



Ramakrishna Mission Residential College, Narendrapur; (right) Behala College

institutions run by the Ramakrishna Mission and St Xavier's College.

The count rose to six this year, with Behala College and St Xavier's College, Burdwan, getting the autonomous status from the UGC.

The official said there was an urgent need to introduce unconventional, industry-relevant courses as many traditional undergraduate programmes were failing to attract students, with a growing number opting to pursue higher education outside Bengal.

Metro reported in April that undergraduate seats in colleges affiliated with Calcutta University are being reduced following an assessment of demand across disciplines.

CU's syndicate decided to reduce seats in four disciplines at Scottish Church College — Bengali, Philosophy, Sanskrit and the multidisciplinary programme (formerly known as pass courses).

Many other colleges have applied to reduce the number of seats in traditional subjects like Mathematics due to a lack of applicants.

"Last year, nearly 50% of undergraduate seats in government and aided colleges remained vacant. Against this backdrop, some colleges are opting for autonomous status, which gives them the freedom to introduce relevant, employment-oriented courses. This is an encouraging trend," the official said.

"Seats are remaining vacant at the postgraduate level also," the official added.

Scottish Church College and Loreto College, the two CU-affiliated colleges, have also applied for autonomy.

Behala College was earlier affiliated with CU. St Xavier's College, Burdwan, was earlier affiliated with Burdwan University.

Swami Ekachittananda, the principal of the Ramakrishna Mission Residential College (Autonomous), Narendrapur, said the master of social work aims to develop social work professionals for the development sector and government/non-government organisations.

"Ramakrishna Mission Lokasiksha Parishad, an integrated rural and urban development unit of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, will provide the necessary hands-on training," the principal said.

Sharmila Mitra, former principal of Behala College and now an adviser to the institution, said the industry-focused programmes in the three subjects are being offered in collaboration with an institute that has over two decades of experience in technical education and student placements.

"We are offering students an industry-aligned curriculum and exposure to the latest tools and technology," Mitra said.